United Nations A/51/PV.68

General Assembly
Fifty-first Session

Official Records

68th plenary meeting
Friday, 29 November 1996, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 *(continued)*

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: reports of the General Committee

Third report of the General Committee (A/51/250/Add.2)

The President: This afternoon I wish to draw the attention of representatives to the third report of the General Committee, concerning a request by a number of delegations for the inclusion in the agenda of an additional item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration", as well as a request by a number of delegations for the inclusion in the agenda of an additional item entitled "Proclamation of 7 December as International Civil Aviation Day".

In paragraph 1 of the report, the General Committee recommends to the General Assembly that an item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration" be included in the agenda of the current session.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to include in the agenda of the current session this additional item?

It was so decided.

The President: The General Committee further decided to recommend to the General Assembly that the additional item be considered directly in plenary meeting.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to consider this item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The President: In paragraph 2 of the report, the General Committee recommends to the General Assembly that an item entitled "Proclamation of 7 December as International Civil Aviation Day" be included in the agenda of the current session.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to include in the agenda of the current session this additional item?

It was so decided.

The President: The General Committee further decided to recommend to the General Assembly that the additional item be considered directly in plenary meeting.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to consider this item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

96-86950 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Agenda item 35

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.33, L.34, L.35, L.36)

The President: I call first on His Excellency Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour, as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to address the General Assembly on the item entitled "Question of Palestine". It also gives me pleasure to convey to you, Sir, the congratulations of our Committee on your election to the presidency of the Assembly. I am convinced that your experience, your in-depth knowledge of this subject and the interest you have shown in the question of Palestine for so long will contribute to the success of our discussions on this item.

Need I recall that as of next April the question of Palestine will have been on the Assembly's agenda for 50 years. The map of the world has changed considerably since 1947, with many new States coming into being and the history of our Organization becoming closely intertwined with the question of Palestine. Today it is hard to believe that half a century later we have still not managed to find a solution to this question.

The start of the Middle East peace process in Madrid, in October 1991, offered the peoples of the region a glimmer of hope. Since then, considerable progress and important groundwork have been accomplished in the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But we must acknowledge today that the fate of the peace process begun five years ago continues to be of concern, as was reflected in the statements of many speakers during the general debate. While we have heard statements in support of the peace process, concerns have also been expressed with regard to the viability of the process. We are all pleased when the peace process progresses normally, in keeping with the agreed timetable and principles; but we are all concerned when the implementation of the accords is slowed down or runs into obstacles.

Allow me to review briefly the developments of the past 12 months in the evolution of the situation and of the relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and the effects of these developments on the Palestinian people. The Committee welcomed the Israeli Government's withdrawal of its forces from six Palestinian towns in the West Bank and from more than 450 villages, and its transfer to the Palestinian Authority of its powers and responsibilities in civil administration and security. The historic election of 20 January 1996 made it possible for the first time to democratically elect the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the President of the Palestinian National Authority. Mr. Yasser Arafat was elected President of the Executive Authority of the Palestinian Council.

In April the Palestinian National Council voted to repeal articles of the Palestine National Charter that ran counter to the agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. That was the first time the National Council had met in Gaza. In May, we witnessed the start of negotiations on permanent status. We also welcomed with satisfaction the first meeting between Mr. Arafat and the new Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, which took place on 4 September. All these events, which are of crucial importance for the Palestinian people and for the Israelis and their Arab neighbours, were welcomed because they created a political climate conducive to the continuation of the peace process.

But as the Assembly knows, conditions on the ground during most of last year were far from favourable. Over the last 12 months our Committee has continued, in accordance with the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, to monitor the situation from the point of view of the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, and the Committee has taken note of serious failures by Israel to respect the commitments it undertook as a party to the agreements and its obligations as an occupying Power, by virtue of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

As regards its commitments, Israel's withdrawal of its troops from Hebron, planned for the month of March, did not take place as agreed due to the Israeli elections. And once the elections were completed, the troops were still not withdrawn. The question was then the subject of

new discussions between the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority following the Middle East Summit, held in Washington in October. Nor did the withdrawal from zone B of the West Bank begin, as planned, in September 1996.

Aside from these flagrant violations of the bilateral agreements, the Israeli authorities have taken steps that have had serious repercussions on the livelihoods and living conditions of the Palestinian people. The systematic cutting off, in February, of zones placed under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority led to the fragmentation of Palestinian communities, isolating them from each other and from the rest of the world. This collective punishment led to a serious crisis: the Palestinians have seen themselves virtually deprived of the right to travel in order to work, study, transact business, buy supplies, worship or seek medical treatment.

Our Committee also deemed unacceptable the interference by Israeli authorities with the activities of the members of the Palestinian Council who represent the Jerusalem district.

The Committee was very concerned by the statements and measures of the new Israeli Government regarding settlements. The confiscation of Palestinian lands and the building of settlements have continued, and plans for the construction of new settlements have already been presented. At the beginning of this month, a high-ranking member of the Cabinet of the Israeli Prime Minister spoke of a "declaration of intent" in referring to plans recently drawn up by the Minister of Housing and Public Works to construct approximately 2,000 dwellings in a new settlement to the north of Ramallah. Such declarations are clearly harmful, for they compromise — and perhaps even nullify — efforts aimed at establishing a climate of trust between the parties. The tendency towards continued expansion of settlements remains quite worrisome in that it translates into a continued increase in the number of settlers.

The Committee also noted that the presence of armed Israeli settlers, placed near fairly well-populated Palestinian communities, created a climate of insecurity and tension that often led to acts of violence and intimidation against the Palestinian population.

The Committee sought to remind the Israeli Government that the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements constitutes a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of the bilateral agreements, according to which there should be no violation of the integrity of the West Bank or of the Gaza Strip, the status of which must remain unchanged during the transitional period, until the completion of negotiations on permanent status.

The international community expressed deep indignation when the Israeli authorities recently decided to open access to the archaeological tunnel in the vicinity of the Haram al-Sharif, in occupied East Jerusalem. This measure provoked riots in the course of which more than 50 Palestinian civilians were killed and a number of others injured. There were also casualties among the Palestinian police forces and the Israeli armed forces. The Security Council met on an urgent basis following these tragic events. At that historic meeting of the Council, 50 speakers, most of them Ministers for Foreign Affairs, denounced the Israeli measures. At the end of the debate, the Council adopted resolution 1073 (1996), in which it called for the immediate cessation and reversal of all acts that had resulted in the aggravation of the situation and had had negative implications for the Middle East peace process. The Council called, in particular, for a restoration of the situation prior to these acts; for the safety and protection of the Palestinian civilians to be ensured; for the immediate resumption of negotiations within the Middle East peace process; and for the timely implementation of the agreements reached.

Our Committee welcomed the subsequent efforts by the United States, as a co-sponsor of the peace process, to prevent the situation from degenerating and to achieve a resumption of the negotiations on permanent status, which had been suspended since May. The negotiations began again only after the Middle East Summit in Washington. After the Summit, the Committee expressed the hope that the parties would be able to overcome the existing difficulties and to move on to substantive consideration of issues relating to permanent status.

These developments have confirmed the Committee's view that the international community should, now more than ever, closely monitor the overall situation at this crucial moment when the Palestinian people is going through a delicate transitional phase that should lead to self-determination and the creation of an independent state.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has always taken the position that a fair, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine must be based on the following: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and

338 (1973); the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to an independent state.

The Committee also takes the view that respect for these fundamental principles by States both within the region and outside of the region could help in the search for global and lasting solutions to the question of Palestine and to the other problems of the region.

In keeping with its mandate, the Committee has continued to contribute to international endeavours to promote the implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, of subsequent implementation agreements — in particular the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — and has continued to mobilize the support of the international community for all forms of assistance to the Palestinian people during the transitional period. Allow me, on behalf of the Committee, to once again thank all the States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations that have lent the Committee their support and have made it possible for a number of events to take place under its auspices, events which they have hosted or in which they have participated.

In 1996 the Committée organized a series of future-oriented meetings: a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people, held in Cairo; a symposium for non-governmental organizations in the North American region, held in New York; and a symposium for European non-governmental organizations and an international meeting of non-governmental organizations, held in Geneva. Israeli and Palestinian personalities, experts from various countries, representatives of donor countries, representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as of organizations and entities of the United Nations system, took an active part in these events. They demonstrated once again that the Committee is able to make a very useful contribution by providing a forum for free-ranging and constructive debate on various aspects of the question of Palestine, thereby enabling all who wish to contribute to the success of the efforts currently under way to promote peace to exchange ideas and share their experiences.

The Committee has continued to underscore the critical role of socio-economic development for the Palestinian people, without which no action to promote peace can be successful. We have expressed the hope that the donor community will do its utmost in this regard and honour its commitments. We have also welcomed the economic initiative for the Middle East and North Africa, which we view as a multilateral mechanism that can promote and speed up the creation of a new economic environment in the region as a whole.

The Committee has taken note of the work done by the Department of Public Information over the past year. Two meetings were held during that period between officers of the Committee and the staff of the Department. At those meetings it was agreed that more regular consultations between the Committee and the Department could help to identify the most effective way to use existing resources to implement all aspects of the special information programme directed towards the Palestinian people.

Following discussions with the Department of Public Information, the Committee welcomes the assurance that a process to implement the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly will be initiated, in consultation with Committee officers and the Department, especially in the preparation of the future annual information programme.

The Committee would like to stress the extent to which the Palestinian people value the fact that the United Nations is continuing to address the question of Palestine at this crucial stage. The Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed that the United Nations has a lasting responsibility vis-à-vis the question of Palestine. It must assume that responsibility and continue to exercise it until the question is settled in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner and with respect for international law. In addition, the Committee believes that the international community cannot remain passive when confronted with the crises in the bilateral negotiating process and that it is politically and morally bound to assist the parties to overcome the obstacles that still threaten the peace process.

Pursuant to the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee will continue to monitor the situation closely with regard to that people's right to exercise its inalienable rights. We shall continue to adapt the Committee's programme of work to reflect the situation on the ground and to make a positive contribution to the efforts of the international community

to find a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

We hope that we shall always be able to rely on the assistance and support of many Member States in this important task. I invite States that support the objectives and activities of our Committee but that have not yet participated in its work as members or observers to do so, as has South Africa, which has just become a part of the Committee as an observer. The presence and contribution of these new members in the new context of the Middle East peace process will assist the Committee to discharge the important mandate entrusted to it. They will thereby make an important and useful contribution to the efforts of the United Nations and the General Assembly to promote peace and security in the Middle East.

The President: I now call upon Mr. Joseph Cassar of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Cassar (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is a pleasure for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur, to present to the General Assembly the report (A/51/35) of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People covering its work in 1996.

During the past year, the Committee has carried out its work on the basis of its mandate as determined by the resolutions of the General Assembly. The report covers important developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee during the past year.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I, which indicates briefly the Committee's objectives and perspectives during the year. Chapters II and III are procedural and summarize the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information (DPI) and give information on the Committee's programme of work. Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine.

The Committee was encouraged that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have proceeded in spite of repeated delays and acts of violence, which have caused many innocent victims on both sides and aroused the concern and condemnation of the international community. While noting a number of positive achievements in the peace process earlier in the year, the Committee has expressed grave concern at the exacerbation of the situation on the ground as a result of the continued closure of the territories and delays in the implementation of the agreements, as well as because of policy decisions of the new Israeli Government concerning Jerusalem, settlements and the next stage of the negotiations. It is particularly disappointing that, despite the efforts made by all concerned, there has been no agreement thus far on the redeployment of Israeli troops from Hebron.

The Committee noted that the situation in the areas still under Israeli occupation gave reason for concern and continued to create facts on the ground that had potential negative effects for the future exercise of Palestinian rights and the peace process. The Committee also voiced its concern at the continued problems relative to the living conditions of Palestinians, in particular in the Gaza Strip.

Chapter V gives an account of the various actions taken by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 50/84 A and B. This includes, in particular, a letter by the Committee Chairman to the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly regarding the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory following Israel's decision to open a new entrance to the archaeological tunnel in East Jerusalem; action taken within the Security Council on that issue, as well as on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory earlier in the year concerning the closure of the Palestinian territory by Israel; attendance at international conferences and meetings at which the Committee was represented by its Chairman because of their particular relevance to its work; and a list of statements, resolutions and communiques relating to the question of Palestine adopted by United Nations bodies, the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and other intergovernmental organizations.

This chapter also contains an account of the action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights, providing an overview of the various adjustments introduced by the Committee in its programme of work in order to make it more useful and cost-effective.

This chapter also gives a brief account of the seminars and symposia of non-governmental organizations that took place in 1996, namely: a meeting of consultations between the representatives of non-governmental organization coordinating committees and

the Bureau of the Committee; a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people held in Cairo, Egypt; a North American non-governmental organization symposium held at New York; and a combined European symposium and international meeting held at Geneva. It also includes an account of the Committee's efforts to convene that meeting in Gaza. Further details on these events are contained in annexes II and III to the report.

This chapter also describes the activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights in the field of research, monitoring and publications, as well as the work done by the Division to expand the United Nations computer-based information system on the question of Palestine (UNISPAL), and describes the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI covers the work of the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/84 C, including the publications, audio-visual material and other activities of the Department. The chapter contains a number of comments with regard to the state of implementation of this mandate and underlines the importance of completing the Department's whole programme during the current biennium.

The seventh and last chapter contains the recommendations of the Committee. The Committee expresses concern over the future of the peace process in the light of the renewed cycle of violence in the area, delays in the implementation of the agreements reached, the prolonged closure of the occupied Palestinian territory and the resumption of the policy of settlements by the Israeli Government.

The Committee also expresses the belief that there is no alternative to negotiations by the parties concerned on the basis of the peace process and that the international community should intensify its efforts towards the effective implementation of the agreements reached, as well as the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis.

The Committee reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached, and that its own role continues to be useful and necessary during the transitional period and until a satisfactory final settlement is achieved.

The Committee also reaffirms that such a settlement must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied since 1967; the principle of exchange of land for peace; and the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, in particular the right to self-determination. The Committee also insists that, during the interim period, Israel must recognize and respect its obligations as the occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Committee calls in particular for an end to the policy and practice of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, which is in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, prejudges the final status negotiations by creating facts on the ground and is therefore contrary to the letter and the spirit of the agreements between the parties, and poses a grave threat to the future of the peace process.

The Committee expresses its concern over the tragic clashes between Palestinians and Israelis in September 1996 and reaffirms the particular status of Jerusalem in accordance with several United Nations resolutions. The Committee recalls that the Security Council has repeatedly affirmed that all measures altering the geographic, demographic and historical character and status of the Holy City are null and void and must be rescinded.

The Committee restates its continued flexibility in its approach and programme of work, while maintaining its position of principle in order to make a concrete contribution, and calls on the General Assembly to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

The Committee expresses its great appreciation to those States that have supported its work and facilitated the organization of events held under the Committee's auspices and calls once again for a broadening of its membership to include countries that support its objectives but have not hitherto participated in its work. In this respect, the Committee welcomes the decision of the Government of South Africa to participate in the work of the Committee as an observer.

The Committee stresses the usefulness of its programme of seminars in the different regions in informing and mobilizing public opinion and promoting an exchange of experience and expertise, and states its intention to continue to organize annually a seminar devoted to the economic and social challenges facing the Palestinians during the transitional period. The

Committee stresses the importance of intensified efforts by non-governmental organizations to organize and coordinate sustained campaigns to inform public opinion and to promote national and international action in support of United Nations resolutions and the Committee's objectives. Noting the continued desire of non-governmental organizations to hold a future meeting in the area under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, the Committee reiterates its call to the Government of Israel not to interfere negatively in this endeavour as an important confidence-building measure.

The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and has requested it to continue its programme of studies and publications, and to develop further UNISPAL, the computer-based information system on the question of Palestine, by including all relevant documentation.

The Committee notes the successful introduction in the Division for Palestinian Rights of a pilot project for the training of staff of the Palestinian Authority in the workings of the United Nations system, and requests it to continue this exercise in the future.

In conclusion, the Committee expresses its intention to continue to strive to achieve maximum effectiveness in the implementation of its mandate and to adjust its programme in the light of developments in order to continue to contribute, to the extent possible, to the realization of the common United Nations objective of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

The President: The next speaker is the Head of the Observer delegation of Palestine, Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi. I call on him in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: Allow me first to extend to you, Sir, my sincere congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. I am convinced that your wisdom, as well as your long-standing experience and skills, will enable you to preside over the session with great ability. I should also like to pay special tribute to the friendly nation of Malaysia for its genuine and historical relationship with our country, Palestine, as it has always supported our just cause and the struggle of the Palestinian people to realize its inalienable rights. Your country, Sir, has also played a distinguished role in defending our cause in the Security Council and in other United Nations forums.

Allow me also at this time to thank your predecessor, Ambassador Diogo Freitas do Amaral, who presided over the fiftieth session with great skill and ability. I should also like to address special thanks on this occasion to the Chairman and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their arduous and persistent efforts in serving and promoting the Palestinian cause. I also wish to express our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for his efforts to promote international peace and security and for his concern for the efficiency and high-quality performance of the different institutions of the United Nations.

The question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process continue to preoccupy the United Nations and its Member States. National and international institutions, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations, continue to debate the question, mainly with the aim of promoting peace and preserving the international will that led to the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference and brought the parties to the long-standing conflict to the negotiating table.

However, we are now witnessing the dwindling of the dynamics of peace and a standstill in the political negotiations within the context of the Middle East peace process, which faces a number of obstacles that have attracted the attention of the world community, particularly since the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the resumption of the cycle of violence, rather than peaceful political negotiations as a means of interaction.

Those recent and sudden developments, which were touched off by Israel as result of opening a tunnel dug alongside the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, forced the Arab Group, at the beginning of this session of the General Assembly, to call for the convening of an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. Several Ministers of Foreign Affairs who participated in those deliberations expressed their concern and dissatisfaction over the Israeli policies and the repressive measures which led to the explosive situation that resulted in a large number of casualties among the Palestinian population. Hundreds were martyred and the upsurge of a new Palestinian *intifadah* as a natural

response to Israeli provocative measures against the Palestinian people, especially in the Holy City of Jerusalem, was expected. The Security Council responded by adopting resolution 1073 (1996).

The policy of the new Israeli Government under the premiership of Mr. Netanyahu is responsible for the faltering of the Middle East peace process. The coming to power of the coalition of the right-wing Likud with other extreme forces a few months ago led to the application of their declared programme, which aims at increasing Jewish immigration, consolidating, expanding, developing and increasing the number of settlements, and imposing land seizures and forceful expropriation. At the same time, it ignores the principle of the exchange of "land for peace", which is the cornerstone of the peace process, as reaffirmed in the United States peace initiative of 1991.

The present Israeli Government has also expressed its opposition to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and to the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, it has consistently reiterated its stand on the need to maintain its occupation of areas in Hebron and Nablus and vital water resources, which constitute the greater part of the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967. Israel also refuses to discuss the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and considers it as non-negotiable. Under the pretence that they constitute a vital part of Israel's territorial security, Mr. Netanyahu has also declared his intention of keeping the Syrian Golan Heights under Israeli jurisdiction and of controlling its water resources. The Israeli Prime Minister has adopted the slogan "peace for peace" and refuses the return to the pre-4 June 1967 borders.

The Israeli Government attempts to gain time by semantic manoeuvring with words and by emphasizing futile details in agreed-upon clauses contained in the agreements reached which it wishes to annul or alter. The endless bickering we are witnessing today over the redeployment of Israeli forces from Hebron is ample proof of Israel's policy of non-compliance with agreements reached between the Palestinian Authority and the previous Israeli Government.

Mr. Nsanze (Burundi), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Netanyahu's Government insists on the necessity of keeping the city divided between a Palestinian population of 120,000 people and only 400 Israeli settlers, brought by the Israeli authorities to allow them to use the excuse of protecting them as a means of prolonging the stay of Israeli forces in the city. This so-called "security" excuse has been used constantly to perpetuate the hold of the Israeli authorities over Palestinian cities, even after the redeployment of Israeli military forces around the cities has taken place. Moreover, Israel has persisted in the imposition of a severe siege on the occupied Palestinian territories since February 1996, which includes the isolation of the city of Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian Arab territories. It decided to resume settlement activities and to expand the existing settlements as well as to continue the confiscation and usurpation of land. Further, Israel insists on aggravating the situation by creating obstacles and imposing restrictions on the flow of foreign aid from donor countries to the Palestinian Authority.

The Israeli Government has refused until this day to allow for the return of displaced persons who were forced — I repeat, forced — to leave the occupied Palestinian territory following the June 1967 war. This is despite the fact that the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements calls for the establishment of a quadrilateral committee composed of Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and Israel to organize the return of those displaced persons, who number no fewer than 750,000 Palestinians now living in neighbouring countries. It has also rejected the return of the Palestinian refugees who were driven from their homeland in 1948, and has called for their resettlement and integration into their present countries of residence. Today, the number of Palestinian refugees has reached some three and a half million. Let me recall here that General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948 justly calls for their right of return and compensation, in accordance with the principles of human rights and international law.

The Arab side has expressed a genuine desire in favour of the peace process. Some countries even normalized their relations with Israel, and were visited by both Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres. However, the present Israeli Government has closed the door on such international and regional efforts, thus giving way to a growing scepticism among Arab countries, some of which have resorted to the interruption of the process of normalization, at the same time questioning all that had been achieved in terms of confidence-building measures with Israel. The convening of the Arab Summit Conference in Cairo in June 1996 served as a signal to the world that the peace process was being thwarted and was in danger of extinction because of Israel's intransigent position, which seems to seek to return to square one and to ignore the achievements of the peace

process. Israel explicitly refuses to accept the clear basis on which the Madrid Peace Conference was convened, namely Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which all call for the withdrawal of Israel from the Arab territories. Israel also attempts to change that basis and to take measures that would indeed torpedo the peace process and plunge the entire Middle East region into a new, vicious cycle of violence and chaos.

The most dangerous of such Israeli policies and measures are those related to the resumption of settlements, the confiscation of land, the siege of Palestinian towns, the repression of the Palestinian people, the prohibition of trade with surrounding Arab countries and the importation of food, and erecting obstacles to the channelling of foreign aid. The Israeli Government has also been launching direct and indirect threats against Syria and Lebanon in its official statements, while at the same time refusing to resume negotiations with them on the basis of what had been achieved between Syria and Lebanon with the previous Israeli Government. The plan called "Lebanon First" is nothing but an Israeli ploy and a fake scenario meant only for media consumption.

The results of the Israeli elections were contrary to what many were expecting. It was widely assumed in international circles that the assassination of the late Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, would push the Israelis to support the Labour party, which participated with the Arabs in the peace process. The victory of the Right gave rise to concerns in international public opinion that Israel might head towards extremism in spite of its many years of engagement in the peace process. The actual events reflected precisely that, and compelled the European Union and its Parliament and Governments to express their concern over the setbacks in the peace process and their fears with regard to its eventual interruption as a result of the aggravation of the situation and the resurgence of violence. Furthermore, President Clinton, appreciating the gravity of the situation, invited President Arafat and Prime Minister Netanyahu to Washington in order to search for ways to stop the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and to urge Israel to pursue negotiations in earnest.

Prior to that, the Security Council considered the events and called upon Israel for

> "the immediate cessation and reversal of all acts which have resulted in the aggravation of the situation, and which have negative implications for the Middle East peace process". (*resolution 1073 (1996), para. 1*)

It also called for

> "the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians to be ensured" (*ibid., para. 2*)

as well as for the

> "immediate resumption of negotiations within the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis and the timely implementation of the agreements reached". (*ibid., para. 3*)

Israel has refused to comply with this resolution just as it has done with previous United Nations resolutions.

A mood of optimism had begun to pervade the international community with the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference. The most optimistic were the Palestinian people themselves, who hoped that their suffering would end and that they could return to normal life and stability in their own cities and villages in an independent Palestinian state, after having lived through half a century of dispersal and alienation.

As an expression of its good intentions, the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization complied with all the required measures for confidence-building with a view to creating a favourable environment for developing conditions ripe for peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis. It was hoped that the way would be paved for a growing optimism through the possibility of achieving promising end results through negotiations.

Unfortunately, the new Israeli Government has not reciprocated, but has even acted arrogantly and in flagrant contradiction to these moves. It has lagged behind and has wavered in the execution of its commitments, has postponed the fulfilment of most of the provisions agreed upon — such as the release of Palestinian prisoners, who now number about 4,500 — and has restricted the freedom of movement of Palestinian citizens within the Palestinian territory. It still controls the entry and exit of Palestinians to and from the Palestinian territory, continues to prohibit the free passage of imports and exports and poses obstacles to the channelling of foreign aid. It has also procrastinated with regard to the redeployment of Israeli forces from other areas and has imposed a harsh siege on Palestinian

territories since February 1996, causing great damage to the Palestinian economy.

Moreover, Israel has refused to hand over powers to the Palestinian Authority in the areas of water resources, electricity and telecommunications. It insists on maintaining the real authority — and even sovereignty — over the land and natural resources. Thus, the current Israeli Government has in point of fact blocked the advance of the peace process. Indeed, it has been working deliberately to pull back from the achievements made over many years.

We had hoped that during this period of time the United States of America would redouble its efforts to invigorate the peace process and use its influence on the Israeli Government in this regard. But it seems that the United States administration was engaged in other issues, and this encouraged Israel to adopt intransigent positions, flouting the will of the international community to establish a just, comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East.

Thus, we view the revitalization of the role of the Russian Federation and the effective participation by the European Union, as well as the constant and important role played by the United Nations, including the Security Council, as crucial and complementary elements for the reinvigoration of the peace process and its preservation from complete fossilization and failure. There is no doubt that all such efforts will help the United States of America in influencing Israel and in saving the peace process.

The question of Palestine remains the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A genuine and comprehensive peace cannot be achieved without putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab land and without the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes, the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable right to self-determination, and the right to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital.

The implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions in this domain remains part of the Organization's continuing responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine, its land and people. The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and its direct responsibility for the welfare of the Palestinian refugees should be maintained until a permanent solution to their situation is reached.

The question of Palestine cannot be resolved simply through the redeployment of Israeli forces, but only through complete withdrawal of the occupation forces from all the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem; through the dismantling of the Israeli settlements, which have been declared illegal by the international community, as is evident in Security Council Resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980); and through the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to sovereignty over their land and natural resources.

The refusal of Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons serves as further proof of its aggressive intentions. Despite its possession of many weapons of mass destruction, it persists in using the excuse of the threat to its security as the basis for its refusal to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories — Palestine, the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. Moreover, Israel has been expressing its intention to annex parts of these territories and to place them under its own jurisdiction.

An adequate balance of forces and interests is a necessary factor for the establishment of a just, comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East. The acknowledgment by the United States of America of the need for such a balance through equal dealing with all the parties and the use of a single standard is the path to political stability.

This should also entail putting an end to the embargo imposed on the brotherly Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, and the ending of the heavy suffering imposed on the brotherly people of Iraq, as well as the preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq and non-intervention in its internal affairs.

The opportunity seems ripe at this historic juncture for the pursuit and development of peace and the preservation of security and stability in the Middle East through the achievement of a just solution to the question of Palestine and adherence to the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principles of its Charter. If this opportunity is not seized, we sincerely feel that the whole Middle East region will plunge into another era of tension, instability and chaos for a long period to come.

Mr. Wang Xuexian (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Middle East peace process has experienced difficulties and setbacks since the beginning of this year. This has been marked by the failure to implement fully the agreements reached between Palestine and Israel and

even by serious bloodshed between the two sides. The ray of hope for peace in the Middle East region has suddenly turned into dark clouds. Although talks have are been now resumed, the two sides have been slow to reach agreement on some major issues. We feel deep regret and anxiety over this situation.

It is therefore imperative for the parties concerned to bring the Middle East peace process out of its difficulties at an early date and to push it forward. We hope that the two sides will conform to the historical trend, cherish the progress made in the peace process since the Madrid Conference and try to achieve concrete results in their talks in a flexible and pragmatic manner and with courage and determination, so that the peace process will quickly return to the track of healthy development.

The Palestinian question has always been at the core of the Middle East question. An early, just and reasonable settlement of this question and the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people constitute a key link in the efforts to achieve peace, stability and development in the Middle East region. All peoples in the region aspire to a secure environment in which to live. However, that will only be a castle in the air without lasting stability and peace.

The half-century history of the Middle East question, particularly the developments in the peace process in recent years, have fully demonstrated that countries in the region can enjoy true security only when there is comprehensive and just peace. We sincerely hope that the parties concerned will settle their disputes through political negotiations on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. Now they should strictly observe and implement the agreements already reached, respect each other, enter into dialogue on an equal footing to narrow differences, and avoid any move that might undermine the peace process, with a view to making further progress in the peace talks.

Since the end of the cold war all countries have been taking this rare opportunity of peace vigorously to develop their economies. The world economy is entering a new period of growth. However, the Middle East economy is seriously hampered by the unstable situation in the region. Foreign investment in the region — which has a population of more than 300 million — accounts for less than 1 per cent of the world's total investment, the lowest among all regions in the world. Experience has proved that comprehensive, just and lasting peace is the primary condition for economic development in the region, which will in turn help consolidate and promote peace and stability there. This is also the common understanding reached at the recent third Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit.

Self-rule has begun in Palestine. For historical and practical reasons, the economy remains in great difficulties. Support and assistance from the international community are therefore urgently needed to develop the economy in the self-rule areas to improve people's living standards rapidly. In this connection, developed countries should undertake greater obligations and, particularly, should carry out at an early date the commitments they have already made to assist Palestine. At the same time, the closure of the self-rule areas should be lifted immediately.

In recent years the United Nations has played an important role in resolving regional disputes and maintaining world peace, and has made contributions to the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question and of the Middle East question as a whole. We hope and believe that the United Nations can play a positive role in promoting the Middle East peace process by rallying international support for the continued implementation by Palestine and Israel of agreements already reached and for continued peace talks between the two sides, thereby facilitating a comprehensive, just and reasonable settlement of the Palestinian and Middle East question.

It is our wish to see peace, stability and development in the Middle East region. China will, as always, work together with the international community for peace and stability in the region. China has already provided economic assistance within its capabilities to the Palestinian people through various channels. We will continue to do so to contribute our share to reconstruction in the Palestinian self-rule areas.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Each year on 29 November, the international community expresses its solidarity with the Palestinian people. We think there is an imperative need today to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, which continues to suffer so greatly from daily Israeli practices, including various forms of persecution, torture, murder, the destruction of houses and the continuing embargo imposed on the Palestinian people and its land.

We are also seeing attempts to change the status of the city of Al-Quds. Furthermore, the Israeli Government has resumed its settlements policies, building new

settlements and expanding existing ones in the occupied Arab territories.

The Government of Israel has not halted its practices or its acts of provocation. Indeed, it has opened a tunnel beside the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, causing a tragedy including the death of 80 persons and the wounding of 1,000 by the Israeli armed forces. These practices form part of the daily practices of Israel against the Arabs in the occupied territories, as clearly reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/678) of 18 November 1996. It has also been reflected in the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, specifically in document A/51/99/Add.2 of 18 October 1996.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/51/543). We would also like to thank the Chairman and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the detailed report contained in document A/51/35 of 19 November 1996. Paragraph 23 of that report notes the Committee's grave concern that the exacerbation of the situation on the ground as a result of the complete closure of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem in particular, has further stifled the Palestinian economy and caused immense suffering and hardship to the Palestinian people. The Committee has reported that some 300,000 Palestinians continue to live in extreme suffering in those territories.

The Committee has expressed concern at the Israeli Government's statement that it will extend its policy of land confiscation and settlement in the occupied territories, including Al-Quds, a policy it has pursued since 1967. That was announced by Israeli's National Infrastructures Minister, who stated that more roads would be built through the West Bank linking Jewish settlements to Israel. The Israeli Cabinet has decided to resume building settlements on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip and to simplify procedures for obtaining permits, placing them under the administration of the Ministry of Defence. Also announced was the provision of millions of dollars of assistance to settlers in the establishment of 4,000 West Bank settlements and the Israeli Government's intention to build 800 houses in the occupied Syrian Golan as part of a broader plan to construct 2,500 houses before the year 2000 and to establish three new settlements.

The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories is an eloquent record. However, we would have liked more details on the atrocities committed against Arabs in the occupied territories. Yet there is some very clear writing on that subject, and anyone interested in the international community's concern about the new Israeli Government and its settlement practices should read that report. We consider the expansion of settlements as part of Israel's overall expansion policy; that policy is just as dangerous as that of building new settlements: both the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones are part of one policy to annex the occupied Arab territories.

In the light of the deterioration of the peace process, we should ask ourselves what the Israeli Government has in mind. What is the fate of the peace process in the light of those practices? The response to that question lies in the following facts. The Prime Minister of Israel has stated that Al-Quds is the eternal capital of Israel, in defiance of the sentiments of Arabs, Muslims, Christians and the international community as a whole, and of binding international resolutions. The Prime Minister refuses to withdraw from Hebron, and has tried to divert attention from the question of Palestine and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people by trying to reduce that question to a mere matter of withdrawal or non-withdrawal from the Avenue of Martyrs in Hebron. How can we believe that Israel is truly considering withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories when the Israeli Government has made so much of withdrawing from a single avenue in a place where 100,000 Palestinians live.

The Israeli Government opened the tunnel; that act was condemned by the international community and the Security Council and was another thorn in the flesh of the peace process, despite the adoption of a Security Council resolution. Israel has not complied with Security Council resolution 1073 (1996), which calls on Israel to reverse its acts and to close the tunnel.

The whole point of current Israeli policy is to cause complications and to engage in acts of provocation, thus delaying the peace process. That is why the Prime Minister gave the green light to plans to prospect for oil in the Golan. He has now announced that three new settlements will be established and existing ones expanded, all of which contravenes the Geneva Convention and international law, and is another Israeli blow to the peace process. The Prime Minister has announced the Government's refusal to withdraw from the Golan and return to the 1967 borders. He refuses to

refer to the Madrid Conference and to the principle of land for peace as a basic principle of international law. That refusal runs counter to the determination of the international community, which has demanded the exchange of land for peace.

In the light of all those facts, and in the light of Israel's dangerous and deliberate policies, I believe the answer to the question I raised is clear: the Israeli Government does not want a just and lasting peace. It is not serious about resuming the peace process. It is attacking the peace process and placing more thorns in the flesh of the peace process. Can the peace process withstand any more thorns? How can Israel be serious about the peace process if it continues to pursue policies of extremism and expansion? Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', the Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs, sent a message to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People saying that since the new Government in Israel came to power, the Israeli Government has missed no opportunity to repeat its intention to change the very basis of peace and to end all efforts made over the last five years, since the Madrid Conference.

In fact, Israel is no longer honouring the commitments it undertook during the previous Government's term of office. He also said that the Palestinian people cannot accept anything less than the attainment of its inalienable rights: the right to self-determination, the right to establish its own State and the right of refugees, in keeping with United Nations resolutions, to return to the homes from which they were uprooted.

There are many people in Israel who are unhappy with the policies of their new Government, which is trying to destroy the peace process. The international community must step up its efforts, as must the sponsors of the peace process — the United States and the European Union. The efforts to salvage the peace process and prevent a disaster in the region have been commendable, particularly since Israel is in favour of war rather than peace. The Israeli Government insistently refuses to respond positively.

We take this opportunity to salute the Palestinian people in the occupied Arab territories and elsewhere, and we reiterate our total support for its just struggle to recover its legitimate national rights. We hope that the international community — in particular the Security Council — will shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter and in accordance with international law and make Israel renounce its obstinate policy, cease establishing new settlements, halt its policy of annexing territory, and return to the peace process on the basis of the Madrid Conference, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace. Israel must honour the commitments undertaken in order to establish a just, lasting peace — an honourable peace that takes into account the interests of all parties, so that peace and stability can prevail in that region.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia): Today we are discussing the question of Palestine, an item inscribed on the General Assembly's agenda for the fiftieth time — that is, ever since the establishment of the United Nations. Last year, when we met here in the commemorative fiftieth session of the General Assembly, we were optimistic about the future work of the Organization. The historic Declaration adopted by the Heads of State underscored our agreed priorities: peace based on the principles and provisions of the Charter, an effective collective security system, equality and sovereignty among States, respect for the rights of people and justice in dealing with issues.

We were optimistic then about the signing of the Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between President Yasser Arafat and the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. That Agreement was described as a landmark achievement on the way to the resolution of the question of Palestine. The question that now arises is: Has the situation changed for the better or for the worse?

Before I comment on the current report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to the General Assembly, I wish to express thanks and appreciation to His Excellency Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee, and to other members of the Committee, for the value of that report and for their efforts to resolve the question of Palestine. I wish to refer to that report in order to answer the question that I raised as to whether the situation had changed for the better or the worse. It says that, notwithstanding certain positive developments, the Committee has noted that the situation in the territories still under Israeli occupation remains a cause for concern. Indeed, new realities on the ground have been created that adversely affect in every way the future exercise by the Palestinian people of its rights, as well as the peace process itself. Of grave concern in this context are the confiscation of land and the question of settlements, including the activity in East Jerusalem. The Committee took note in particular of the plans to

establish more settlement dwellings and of the construction of roads linking settlements — developments that, in the final analysis, lead to the compartmentalization of the West Bank and the isolation of East Jerusalem.

What causes us to feel both sad and concerned is that the Israeli Government has not shown the serious commitment to the peace process demonstrated by the Arab side. Quite the contrary: since its assumption of power the Government of Mr. Netanyahu has persistently made public statements and pursued positions that cannot serve the peace process in any way. In contrast to the Arab commitment to the Madrid principles, Security Council resolutions, and the principle of land for peace, we find the declarations of the Israeli Government insistent on consolidating the Israeli occupation of Arab land and on maintaining the annexation of East Jerusalem, which is the first place to which Muslims turn for prayers and the third holy site in Islam. And we find the Israeli Government lagging in the implementation of the accords reached between the Israeli authorities and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The question of Holy Jerusalem is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and remains the focal point of interest for the Arab and Islamic worlds. How this question is addressed will affect the entire peace process. It is regrettable that day in and day out the Israeli authorities continue to take measures aimed at creating demographic and institutional changes with a view to changing the status of Holy Jerusalem and thus affecting the outcome of the final negotiations in the final status talks. Israel must immediately cease its practices with regard to Jerusalem, which is an Arab city. The United Nations recognizes that it is an Arab city which has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

One of the most serious causes of tension and danger in the occupied Arab territories is the existence of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip and the persistent expansion of such settlements. We in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have noted with great concern the decision by the Israeli Government to lift the freeze on the building of new settlements. We consider these Israeli measures to be another factor in heightening tension and encouraging violence. Such practices also undermine the credibility of the Israeli Government on the question of peace.

International statistics estimate that about 93 per cent of the land of the holy city of Jerusalem has been confiscated. New measures include the expansion of existing settlements and the confiscation of land for the construction of roads in order to link the Israeli settlements together. Moreover, these roads are not being built in line with transportation needs, but are like superhighways, larger than airport runways. No one can really think that a settlement of 300 to 500 people requires a superhighway of that order, when Palestinian cities of 400,000 people do not have roads half that size.

In addition to the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories, we note a great deterioration in the economic and social living conditions of the Palestinian people. This is due primarily to the perpetuation of the Israeli occupation and the closure of the territories by the Israeli authorities since 25 February 1996. This has had serious consequences for agriculture and industry; many stores have been closed and there are serious shortages of basic foods such as bread and rice. All here have heard about the serious implications of the shortage of flour: Palestinians are forced to stand in long lines in order to obtain wheat flour for bread-making. This serious shortage has resulted from the Israeli authorities' halting the import of wheat flour from or through Israel. This lasted over a month, after which, claiming that it was "easing" the siege, Israel allowed the entry of 5 to 10 per cent of the amount of flour required by Palestinians for their daily bread. And what is true of wheat flour applies to other humanitarian supplies such as food and medicine. The renewed closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has intensified restrictions on the food imports and thus forced needy families to live on vegetables, without any bread at all. The question now is how Israel can be moving towards peace while denying Palestinians the flour they need for their daily bread.

The practice of torture and intimidation by the Israeli authorities and Jewish settlers against Arab citizens in the occupied Arab territories leads to nothing but the creation of a wall of distrust and hatred. This hatred has been intensified by the decision of the Israeli Supreme Court allowing Israeli interrogators to use torture against Palestinian detainees. We see this decision as a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of the spirit of the peace process for the whole Middle East that started in Madrid, and of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment adopted by this Assembly. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process has reached a critical point. The impetus towards peace must be maintained by implementing the accords that have been reached or the

Middle East as a whole will suffer from the potentially vicious cycle of violence, conflict and bloodshed.

We in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia call upon the parties entrusted with the peace process in the Middle East, especially the co-sponsors of the Madrid Peace Conference — namely the United States of America and the Russian Federation — and the countries of the European Union, to move quickly and effectively in order to maintain the momentum generated by the peace process. We call on them to bring pressure to bear on Israel to comply with the rules of international law and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and 252 (1968), as well as with the principle of land for peace, in order to make the Middle East a region of peace, security and stability, as it was in the past.

Mr. Zlenko (Ukraine): It is becoming a tradition for the General Assembly to consider the question of Palestine on the day when the international community observes its Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This special occasion gives us a good opportunity to express our support for the Palestinian people in its aspiration to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty. Moreover, we have the possibility of determining, on the basis of objective analysis, the practical ways and means of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of this long-standing problem.

The delegation of Ukraine is convinced that progress in this direction can and should be achieved on the basis of agreements reached at the Madrid Peace Conference and in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Full implementation of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements that have already been signed, in particular the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, is a guarantee of further progress.

At the same time, the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as a guarantor of international legitimacy and as an important factor in the mobilization and provision of international assistance, is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts.

During the year that has passed since we discussed this item at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, the course of events on the Israeli-Palestinian track has been like a roller-coaster ride. The period has been marked by profound hopes and serious achievements, as well as by big disappointments and deep frustrations.

The first Palestinian elections, on 20 January this year, which followed the Israeli redeployment from six West Bank towns and a number of villages, revived confidence that the peace process had become irreversible and provided a solid basis for the self-determination of the Palestinian people. Another example of the continuous commitment to the cause of peace and democracy courageously pursued by the Palestinian people and its leadership was the decision taken on 24 April 1996 by the Palestinian National Council to amend the Palestinian National Charter so that it would no longer deny the right of the State of Israel to exist. That step, which shows that support for peace among the Palestinians is indeed widespread, was highly appreciated and commended in Ukraine.

At the same time, a renewed cycle of violence in the area resulting from acts by extremists, delays in the implementation of the agreements reached and sporadic closures of the territories, with grave economic consequences, has given rise to a feeling of despair over the very future of the peace process. It was with deep concern that the people of Ukraine learned of the tragic events in Jerusalem that followed the opening of the entrance to the tunnel in the vicinity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which led to the aggravation of the situation in the region and had negative implications for the Middle East peace process. In this regard, we wish to underline the important role played by the Security Council, which immediately responded to those events and adopted resolution 1073 (1996), which to some degree defused the situation.

As a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ukraine maintains that there is no alternative to the process of Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations based on the principles of mutual respect, confidence, adequate understanding by each side of the other's interests and a readiness to come to a reasonable compromise. That is why, in our opinion, it is imperative that at the present stage mistrust and suspicion be overcome, that there be an end to provocative acts and confrontation, that previously reached agreements be implemented in good faith and that there be an early resumption of genuine and comprehensive peace talks aimed at a just and lasting solution of the problem of Palestine.

There is no doubt that simultaneous measures should be taken to achieve a comprehensive normalization of Arab-Israeli relations, the key element of which should

be real progress on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks.

The international community in turn should undertake all possible measures to contribute to the fullest extent possible to that process on the basis of effective coordination and complementarity, within the framework of the existing negotiating mechanisms. Proceeding from that understanding, Ukraine welcomes the efforts by the United States and the European Union aimed at strengthening confidence between the parties to the conflict and settling the remaining differences on the way to the implementation of relevant agreements.

The delegation of Ukraine believes that, apart from the political aspects of the problem, the economic development of the Palestinian territories and assistance in building and strengthening the Palestinian economy are acquiring an ever- increasing importance. In this context, the international community, including the United Nations, should give priority to the everyday needs of Palestinians and to mobilizing additional financial resources for the programmes and projects adopted at the Paris and Brussels Conferences. We are of the view that Israel's gradual integration into the economy of the Middle East region as a whole would contribute to regional economic stabilization.

Our delegation welcomes the activities of programmes and agencies of the United Nations system aimed at providing assistance to the Palestinian people, and supports the establishment of a coordinating mechanism to ensure effective disbursement of donor funds. In this regard, I would like to emphasize that the Palestinian people can count on the support of Ukraine which, with its considerable scientific and technological potential, stands ready to develop dynamic Ukrainian-Palestinian cooperation in the economic sphere, in particular in the sectors of housing and capital construction, water supply, education and training. We hope that the results of the fruitful meeting between the President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma, and the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Yasser Arafat, which took place three days ago at Bethlehem, will give significant impetus to the process of strengthening bilateral cooperation in both the political and the socio-economic fields.

Recent events in the region make it very clear that terrorism represents a serious threat to the Middle East peace process. Ukraine strongly condemns the brutal and violent practices employed by some extremist groups to undermine the efforts aimed at establishing peace in the region. We unconditionally reject terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and we are convinced that peace in the region, as well as the settlement of the problem of Palestine, can be achieved only through constructive dialogue and on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance.

In conclusion, let me confirm Ukraine's steadfast commitment to the establishment of peace in the region and express our readiness to be actively involved in international cooperation to achieve a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem.

Mr. Abdullah (Malaysia): Today's debate is of particular significance as it coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. As we commemorate this auspicious occasion, my delegation hopes that the debate today will serve as a reminder to the international community of its continuing responsibility towards the Palestinian people in their quest for just and lasting peace and security in their homeland.

Since the beginning of the Madrid peace process in October 1991, some positive developments have taken place in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993 between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, and the subsequent agreements, especially the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1995 have led to the phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from 6 major West Bank towns and 450 villages, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the deployment of a Palestinian police force in the areas involved. These are indeed important political steps towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

This year, 1996, has also witnessed some additional encouraging developments which constitute further important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem. This includes the first Palestinian elections to the 87-member Legislative Council and the Presidency of the Palestinian Authority on 20 January 1996, and the start of negotiations on 5 May 1996 on the permanent status of the Palestinian territory although these were adjourned after a number of procedural decisions were taken. The decision of the Palestinian National Council to repeal articles of the Palestinian National Charter which

were inconsistent with the agreements signed between the PLO and Israel was of historic and political importance. This, without doubt, was testimony to the commitment and sincerity of the PLO as regards a lasting peace settlement with Israel.

While some political progress has been made, we have also seen negative developments creeping in which could undermine or even undo the progress made thus far. My delegation is particularly concerned about the new policy adopted by the Israeli Government concerning the basis of the peace process, the principle of land for peace, and issues related to a final settlement especially on the questions of Jerusalem, settlements, the return of refugees and Palestinian sovereignty. There is no doubt that this change of policy contradicts the principles already agreed upon by both sides, especially the Declaration of Principles of 1993 and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 1995.

Recent unilateral actions by the Israeli Government, such as closing areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, banning the traffic of persons and goods in the Gaza Strip, preventing Palestinians from entering and working in Israel, lifting the ban on the expansion of settlements, resuming the plan to build highways through the West Bank to connect Jewish settlements with Israel, and more recently opening the entrance to a tunnel in the vicinity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem and delaying the redeployment of Israeli troops from Hebron, have only heightened tension between the Palestinian people and the Israeli Government and people. The opening of the tunnel alone led to tragic events resulting in the killing of more than 50 Palestinians and injuries to over 1,000 others by the Israeli army and police. These actions constitute serious setbacks to peace and might undo the entire peace process.

One of the policies of the new Israeli Government which is of serious concern to my delegation is that of renewed expansion of land confiscation and settlement. The resumption of the policy of the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, which had been banned under the previous Israeli Government in 1993, is most disturbing and indeed should be strongly resisted. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People tells us that on 19 September 1996 the Israel authorities approved plans to build another 4,000 housing units. The expansion will result in an increased number of Israeli settlers in the occupied areas. The negative consequences of this policy are obvious and will further complicate the delicate peace process. This policy must be immediately discontinued as it is a clear violation of international humanitarian law, in particular of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is also against the provisions of agreements signed between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government which preserve the integrity and status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the transitional period, pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations.

My delegation is particularly concerned with the human rights situation in the occupied territories as observed by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories in its twenty-eighth report. The report concluded that:

> "the situation of human rights in the occupied territories has deteriorated remarkably since the beginning of the peace process, contrary to expectations". *(A/51/99/Add.2, p. 6)*

The deterioration, according to the report, is directly attributable to the policy and practices of the Israeli Government and authorities, carried out on the pretext of security needs, in the occupied territories. The Israeli Government should discontinue forthwith using security considerations as an excuse to justify its continued violation of human rights in the occupied territories.

While the overall picture on the political front is not entirely satisfactory, the economic and social situation on the ground remains equally bleak. The economic, social and living conditions on the ground have clearly deteriorated and have been further aggravated by the never-ending restrictions on movement and the closures imposed by the Israeli authorities. This is indeed regrettable — very regrettable.

The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/51/35) has projected that the closure would cost the Palestinian economy $800 million by the end of this year. Average unemployment would be over 30 per cent, and in the Gaza Strip alone unemployment would increase to over 50 per cent. As the Palestinian economy continues to deteriorate, the social situation in the occupied areas is also worsening, especially in the area of public health. The closure has caused further deterioration in the health situation, particularly in Gaza, as the provision of foodstuffs and medical supplies was restricted. In addition, many people in need of urgent medical

treatment unavailable locally were denied permits to travel to the West Bank or to Israel. This clearly shows the grave ongoing socio-economic consequences of Israeli policies and practices for the people in the occupied areas.

For peace to flourish between the Palestinians, the Arabs and the Israelis, progress in the search for a permanent political settlement needs to be accompanied by economic growth and development, in particular an improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the population in the occupied areas. Immediate efforts must be made to alleviate the economic hardships with which the Palestinians are burdened. In this regard, my delegation wishes to pay special tribute to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its leading role, especially in the fields of education and health and in relief and social services in the occupied territories. In order to ensure that UNRWA can successfully carry out its difficult task, adequate and predictable financial resources must be made available. My delegation is concerned at the worsening of UNRWA's financial situation, which, if not immediately addressed, will adversely affect the Agency's effectiveness and viability. It is therefore critical for the international community, particularly the donor countries, to be more generous in their contributions to UNRWA. For its part, Malaysia will continue to contribute within its means to the Agency's General Fund.

My delegation also wishes to commend the role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People under the leadership of Ambassador Ka of Senegal, and commends its bureau for its untiring efforts and its contribution to the cause of the Palestinian people.

My delegation urges the Israeli Government to honour scrupulously all the peace agreements it has entered into with the Palestinian Authority. Any departure from the agreements will only dash all prospects and hopes of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region. The Israeli Government should desist from making any attempt to create new realities on the ground or to dictate new terms and conditions before resuming negotiations. We welcome the recent meeting between President Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu because we believe that to achieve progress both sides must continue their substantive negotiations on the basis of a genuine commitment and a willingness to find a lasting settlement based on an increasing sense of trust and understanding.

My delegation reaffirms Malaysia's total commitment to and unwavering support for the Palestinian people and its leadership in their quest for the restoration of all their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the right to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian nation and homeland. We are confident that the Palestinian Authority under President Arafat will steer the Palestinian people towards this end, which would, hopefully, contribute positively to the peace, security and prosperity of the region.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me pleasure on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates to extend our thanks and appreciation to Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to the other members of the Committee and to wish them every success.

The General Assembly debate on the question of Palestine coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is a reminder to the international community of its responsibility to support and assist the Palestinian people to resolve their problem. That problem began at the time of the establishment of the United Nations and has since been affected by international trends. United Nations debates have graphically demonstrated the scope of the plight of the Palestinian people — the chapters of oppression and deprivation of half a century of Israeli occupation.

Despite the political developments and the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the subsequent agreements which committed Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories it has occupied since 1967, actual events in the territories since the accords have been a cause of anxiety and frustration for the international community.

What is cause for concern regarding the future of this issue is that not only does the current Israeli Government resort to policies of equivocation, procrastination and selectivity in implementing the obligations undertaken by the former Israeli Government, but the current Government has actually backtracked on those legal obligations, which were set forth in the agreements concluded in the context of the peace process. All of this has fuelled the feelings of despair among the Palestinian people and heightened the tension in the occupied territories.

The delegation of the United Arab Emirates, which has carefully studies the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, expresses its disappointment over the issues monitored and analysed in the report. The statistics contained in the report clearly reflect the true intentions behind the Israeli practices. The most serious of these practices is the intensification of the policy of land confiscation, construction of new settlements and expansion of existing ones, especially in the city of Jerusalem, which undermine the Islamic and historic sites, including the complex of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel is thereby flouting its legal obligations under the peace accords based on international law and the principle of land for peace.

The current Israeli Government's decision to lift the restrictions imposed from 1993 by the previous Israeli Government on the building of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and its agreement to the building of new settlements has contributed significantly over the past few months to the construction of thousands and thousands of new settlement units on the land assets and property of the unarmed Palestinian people. The number of immigrant settlers from all parts of the world aims at further judaization of the areas, a goal that has been pursued by successive Israeli Governments since 1948.

In order to impose this *fait accompli* within the Palestinian territories and to divert world public opinion from the expansionist policies, the Israeli Government, under the pretext of security, has resorted to a new method of collective punishment against the Palestinian people. It has implemented measures of seizure and prolonged closure of all Palestinian cities and villages and imposed harsh restrictions on the freedom of movement, work, trade, education, medical treatment, and so on. All of this has contributed significantly to the deterioration of the Palestinian economy and thus aggravated starvation, poverty, disease, death rates and unemployment as well as the lowering of local income to unprecedented levels.

All these Israeli measures are in addition to the measures of brutal force, oppression and arbitrary detention which are daily practices perpetrated by the Israeli authorities and settlers against the Palestinian people. An example was reported by both television and press agencies a few days ago, when Israeli soldiers were seen brutally mistreating some Palestinian labourers. This is cause for concern, as it is a violation of the most basic humanitarian code of conduct, the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions. These double standards in terms of human rights must therefore be given new attention by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The United Arab Emirates, which welcomes the peace process on the basis of international law and the land for peace principle, considers illegal and inadmissible all current Israeli measures aimed at changing the demographic composition and the legal status of the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, including the city of Jerusalem, Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. This applies also to the inhuman Israeli practices perpetrated against the Palestinian people under the pretext of security. Accordingly, we emphasize that the security sought by Israel will not be attained by maintaining its hold on Palestinian and other Arab territories nor by practices of suppression, military superiority and settlement building. On the other hand, it would be attained by complete Israeli withdrawal from all those territories and the unconditional and non-selective compliance with the entire principles of peace in the Middle East. This requires the international community, especially the sponsors of the peace process, to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to reconsider its current policy based on defiance and obstruction.

Israel must fully implement its bilateral and international legal obligations, including, primarily, ending the construction and expansion of settlements, a complete and unconditional withdrawal from the city of Hebron, the release of Palestinian prisoners, and engaging in earnest negotiations in the permanent status talks with the Palestinian Authority in order to find a final and just solution to the question of Palestine. That requires an increase in the international assistance provided to the Palestinian people and the fulfilment of donor countries' pledges so that the Palestinian people will be able to rebuild the institutional development structures destroyed as a result of Israeli occupation. There is also a need to develop the self-reliance capabilities of the Palestinian people in order to promote social, economic, and human development.

In conclusion, the delegation of the United Arab Emirates believes that any peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must emanate from the accords concluded between the Palestinian Authority and Israel and on the basis of the United Nations resolutions, especially General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) of 1947 and 194 (III) of 1948 and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). We underline the importance of expanding and revitalizing the role of the United

Nations, especially the Security Council, in this current transitional phase that faces the Palestinian people, in order to achieve self-determination and promote peace, security and stability on all national territory. We also renew our commitment to find an overall solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the question of Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, security arrangements and national boundaries, in a way that ensures the decent and safe return of the Palestinian people to their homeland and enables them to exercise their national right to establish an independent state on all the Palestinian territory, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): It is a matter of deep and profound concern to my delegation that our deliberations are being held against the backdrop of disturbing developments in the Middle East. Formidable difficulties are being encountered in the ongoing peace process. Palestinians are facing new challenges and obstacles in the struggle to attain their legitimate national rights and to establish a sovereign independent state. The new era of cooperation, reconciliation and justice, leading to stable peace in the region as promised by the historic Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements agreed between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, is at real risk.

Over the past year we have of course witnessed a number of notable developments — the phased redeployment of Israeli forces from a number of Palestinian areas, the transfer of powers and responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority, and the holding of the first Palestinian elections in January 1996. Our sense of cautious optimism was further bolstered by the initiation of permanent status negotiations in May 1996 between the two sides, in accordance with the provisions of the Declaration of Principles.

These encouraging developments offered hope that they would lead to a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and respect for the rights of parties to the conflict. To our disappointment and dismay, however, the current peace process is in jeopardy as a result of the Israeli Government's policies, which are clearly inconsistent with the basic terms of reference of the peace process. The resumption of untenable settlement activities, the confiscation of Arab land and closure of the Palestinian territory, as well as the position taken on the issue of Jerusalem, threaten to undermine the peace process.

In September 1996, the deterioration in the situation reached new depths with the opening of a new entrance to the archaeological tunnel along the Western Wall of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem. Through its action, Israel endangered the security and integrity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque — and indeed the peace process itself. This alarming development, which triggered a violent confrontation resulting in a large number of deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians, became the focus of a Security Council debate, with the participation of ministers for foreign affairs of a number of countries, and subsequently led to the adoption of Security Council resolution 1073 (1996).

Also over the past year, arbitrary closures of areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, reportedly the most draconian since the Israeli occupation in 1967, have had a severely impact on the nascent Palestinian economy. The prohibition on the movement of persons and goods within the areas, as well as between them and Israel and the neighbouring territories, has confined the population to small enclaves isolated from the outside world, including access to East Jerusalem. Unemployment has spiralled, as thousands of Palestinian people are deprived of their livelihood. Economic activities have come to a virtual standstill. Restrictions on medical supplies have caused a deterioration in health facilities. And, in a manner reminiscent of Israel's past practices, educational institutions have been summarily closed. The obstructions have also jeopardized assistance projects provided by the international community, thereby undermining the fabric and well-being of Palestinian society.

What we have been witnessing is nothing less than a collective punishment — in blatant contravention of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 — of some 2.5 million Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

While the representatives of Palestine have adopted a balanced and reasonable approach and demonstrated their sincere wish to move the negotiations forward, the actions of the Israeli Government reflect a manifest lack of commitment to the peace process. Time and again, it has added fuel to the smouldering fires of frustration. We therefore call on Israel to implement without delay and in full the provisions of the various agreements already reached, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from Hebron and the commencement of negotiations on the final status of the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and questions relating to refugees and settlements. In this regard, we earnestly hope that the

Middle East Summit held last October in Washington will spur the negotiations forward and expedite the full implementation of the peace accords.

In the light of the critical economic situation and the need to sustain the fragile peace, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are squarely met and a final settlement is reached in all its aspects, the United Nations will continue to have a permanent responsibility towards the Palestinian people. In this connection, it is imperative that the international community continue to extend assistance to the Palestinian people as it embarks on the challenge of nation-building. The process of rehabilitation should be completed in order to provide a firm foundation for building a stable, secure and prosperous state of Palestine.

As we near the end of the twentieth century, it is fitting to recall that no other conflict has so preoccupied the United Nations as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the core of which is the question of Palestine. The dangers of ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people, as well as their just cause to live in peace in their own homeland, are all too painfully obvious. After decades of instability and strife in the region, and too many missed opportunities, it is time to exert every effort to ensure that a just and lasting peace will ultimately prevail in the Middle East region, based on the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Montoya (Colombia) (*interpretation from Spanish*): The celebration today of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People gives particular significance to the debate in this plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine. The Government of Colombia, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, is pleased to join in this celebration.

The Non-Aligned Movement has closely followed developments in the process begun in 1991 at Madrid, which marked the opening up of fresh possibilities of finding a peaceful and negotiated settlement to the conflict that has afflicted the Middle East for so long. The establishment of a Palestinian state in a context of coexistence and mutual respect among the States of the region, together with effective attainment by the Palestinian people of its rights, are basic aspects which deserve our continued support.

As will be recalled, at the most recent Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement the Heads of State or Government expressed their unconditional support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people to secure respect for their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, and once again called on Israel to withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including Jerusalem.

The Movement also once again voiced its concern about Israel's attempt to alter the religious and historical nature of the Holy City. For this reason, the Movement has endorsed all Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the question of Jerusalem. These include the agreements and conventions concerning the preservation of Palestinian institutions and the Islamic and Christian holy places in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The provisions relating to the establishment of a provisional, autonomous Palestinian government should continue to be implemented so as to ensure that the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993 can be applied as quickly as possible to all the occupied territories. To the same end, new measures are necessary in order to complete Israel's withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967, thus ensuring that total peace and shared prosperity prevail throughout the area.

The United Nations has a great responsibility to bear with regard to the question of Palestine. That responsibility should continue until the Palestinian people exercises its inalienable right to self-determination, an independent and sovereign state is established in its national territory, and the problem of the refugees is settled pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions.

In order to maintain support for this process, it is also vital to promote the economic and social development of the occupied Palestinian territories. International assistance and cooperation are of great significance to this end.

On 25 November last, the ministers for foreign affairs of the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirmed the position taken at the most recent Summit of the Movement with respect to the question of Palestine and the Middle East. They also voiced their concern at the worsening of the situation in the region, and particularly the difficulties that the peace process has been experiencing as a result of Israel's refusal to put the agreements already reached into effect.

They called again on Israel to withdraw completely from all the Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem, southern Lebanon, the western Bekaa and the Syrian Golan. They again expressed their support for the peace process on the basis of the Madrid Peace Conference, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace.

In this way the Non-Aligned Movement has reaffirmed its long-standing and unequivocal support for the Palestinian people, in the hope of shortly seeing its just aspirations fulfilled as the outcome of its legitimate, unwavering and exemplary struggle.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): I would like, at the outset, to re-emphasize that the Government of Israel and the Israeli people yearn for and are committed to peace with all our neighbours. We have experienced too many wars in which tens of thousands of Israelis and Arabs have been killed. I would like to use this opportunity to call on my Arab colleagues to rededicate themselves, together with us, to reach peace in the region and to avoid war and violence.

It is now more than three years since Israel and the Palestinians embarked on the historic path down the road of peace. We knew then that the road to achieving a lasting peace would be long and arduous, but we also knew that this was the only path available to all of us.

At that time it was mutually decided that the only way to bring about a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through direct, face-to-face negotiations between the parties themselves — Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization — and through mutual recognition. These negotiations led to the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements on 13 September 1993, and to the subsequent signing of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area of 4 May 1994 and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on 28 September 1995.

These agreements have served as the basis for a new relationship between Israel and the Palestinians in the interim period until a permanent status has been agreed upon. The agreements have led to real, positive changes on the ground. In May 1994, the Israel Defence Forces redeployed from Gaza and Jericho, transferring responsibility over these areas to the Palestinian Authority. Late last year, the Israel Defence Forces redeployed from the six major Palestinian cities on the West Bank, again transferring full power to the Palestinian Authority.

As a result, today over 70 per cent of the residents of Gaza and the West Bank, in the six cities and 450 towns and villages, live under the administration of the Palestinian Authority, which is responsible for running all their day-to-day affairs. Moreover, in January of this year, the Palestinians held open, democratic elections throughout Gaza and the West Bank for representatives to the Palestinian Legislative Council and the presidency of the Palestinian Authority.

Yet the fruits of the peace process have not been reaped without cost. During a span of eight days last February and March, Islamic fundamentalist terrorists murdered 63 Israeli citizens in four separate suicide attacks. Each one of these suicide bombers started on his murderous mission from areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

This situation necessitated the imposition of a closure of the territories. Israel is aware of and sensitive to the fact that the closure has economic implications for the residents of the West Bank and Gaza. This is the reason why we are taking active measures to ease the closure without, of course, compromising Israeli security. The number of Palestinian workers allowed into Israel, for instance, has been increased recently to 35,000 per day — 20,000 from the West Bank and 15,000 from Gaza.

The Government of Israel is committed to the peace process with the Palestinians, to the agreements signed with them, and to their implementation by both sides. This includes revoking the clauses of the Palestinian National Covenant that call for the destruction of the State of Israel, extraditing to Israel terrorists wanted for the murder of Israelis, disarming the Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorist groups that operate from areas under Palestinian control, and refraining from incitements to violence against Israel such as praise for terrorist acts, calls for a *jihad* (holy war) against Israel and threats to renew the *intifadah*. The Palestinian representative who spoke earlier in the meeting was interviewed only this week by the Arab weekly magazine *Al-Wasat*, which is published in London. He said, among other things, that there is great justification for the suicidal attacks carried out against Israel by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. That statement is in clear contradiction to the commitments undertaken by the Palestinians and Chairman Arafat.

For the past two months, Israel and the Palestinians have been conducting negotiations on the Israel Defence Forces' redeployment from Hebron. Israel is committed

to fulfilling its obligations as agreed in the Interim Agreement. But that redeployment cannot take place until the security of all the residents of Hebron, Jews and Arabs alike, is ensured and their freedom of access to worship at the holy sites is ensured. We trust that the agreement will be signed soon and we call on Chairman Arafat not to delay its signature anymore. Let us conduct our negotiations in an atmosphere of cooperation and not confrontation, through direct communication and not through provocations and threats.

After the completion of the implementation of the Interim Agreement, negotiations will open on the permanent status. The issues related to the permanent status, including settlements, will be negotiated directly between Israel and the Palestinians. The General Assembly should refrain from adopting resolutions on those issues, such as the draft resolutions before you, which tend to predetermine the results of the negotiations before they are concluded.

Furthermore, I regret that this year, once again, the United Nations General Assembly is being used for political purposes. The draft resolutions before us, and similar resolutions of past years, may possibly have satisfied their sponsors, but they definitely have not benefited the Palestinian people. The Palestinians know that the only way to advance their cause is through direct negotiation, and not through anachronistic resolutions or committees, the existence of which stands in clear contradiction to the peace process. For the sake of Palestinians and Israelis alike, let us redouble our efforts towards negotiations without extraneous resolutions.

The road to peace is long and irreversible and we will, together with the Palestinians, march down that road until full peace is concluded.

The Acting President (*interpretation from French*): We have heard the last speaker on the list for today's meeting. We shall now adjourn. The remaining speakers on this item will have the opportunity to speak at the next meeting, to be held on Monday, 2 December, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.